



GET ATTENTION: CATCHY COVER LETTERS!

FACILITATOR GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

This 40 minute session introduces students to the purpose, importance and use of cover letters. Students will be prepared to construct a cover letter that will get attention.

Additional time will be required for students to complete the Cover Letter Template Working Copy prior to inputting the cover letter information to an electronic template.

Note: This session is recommended following completion of the Pick Up and Go Kit “Get Noticed: Resumes that Work!” Students should have a copy of their resumes available when constructing their accompanying cover letters.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Students will understand what a cover letter is and how it differs from a resume.
2. Students will develop awareness of the importance and use of a cover letter.
3. Students will be able to identify characteristics of an excellent cover letter.
4. Students will recognize key components of a cover letter.
5. Students will compose a targeted cover letter.

MATERIALS

Handout 1 – Cover Letter Samples A and B

Handout 2 – Resume Samples A and B

(From “Get Noticed: Resumes that Work!”)

Handout 3 – Cover Letter Template Working Copy

Handout 4 – Cover Letter Checklist

Electronic Cover Letter Template

Teacher References: Alberta Employment and Immigration publications “Advanced Techniques to Work Search” and “Job Seeker’s Handbook”



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OVERVIEW AND TIMELINES

Introduction – What is a cover letter?	3 Minutes
Part of the Package	7 Minutes
Cover Letters: Let's have a look!	7 Minutes
Getting Started!	20 Minutes
Wrap Up	3 Minutes

ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION – WHAT IS A COVER LETTER?

As an introduction to cover letters, ask the students the following two questions.

1. **What** is a cover letter?

Top Up List for Facilitators

- A business document that accompanies a resume or application
- Most often, a work search tool submitted to prospective employers
- A method of self-marketing or advertising skills, experiences and accomplishments

2. **What** is the purpose of a cover letter?

Top Up List for Facilitators

- Captures attention and interest of reader
- Introduces you to reader
- Highlights skills, experiences, accomplishments and key information relevant to the specific requirements of a specific opportunity (eg. job, scholarship, volunteering, travel exchange, etc.)
- Motivates reader to look at the accompanying resume and invite you to an interview
- Explains why you are interested in the opportunity

PART OF THE PACKAGE

Remind students that just as a resume is used to apply for many different types of opportunities, so should cover letters be used when looking for employment as well as volunteer work, scholarships, school trips, exchange travel, leadership opportunities, Off-campus programs (Work Experience, RAP, etc.)



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Use the analogy of a movie and its trailer to emphasize how a resume and a cover letter work together to market an individual's skills, experiences and accomplishments as a package.

Ask the students what the purpose of a movie trailer is.

- *The goal of a trailer is to capture attention and generate interest for the movie so that viewers will be enticed to see the movie in its entirety.*

This is exactly the same relationship between a cover letter and a resume! The resume is like a movie, longer and more in-depth, while the cover letter is the trailer, shorter but with key information that will entice the reader to look at the resume. The resume and the cover letter work best together as a package in the work search process.

Knowing the Difference

Explain that while resumes and cover letters work together, they are two very different documents. Each has its own structure and purpose.

Highlight and discuss the differences between resumes and cover letters.

Resumes:

- Broad overview of skills, experiences, education, accomplishments, activities
- Used over and over with minor changes

Cover Letters:

- Unique letter to a specific person and tailored to a specific job or opportunity
- Shines spotlight on the information most relevant to the job or opportunity
- Must complement, not just repeat information from resume

Why is it an advantage to submit a cover letter along with a resume?

Top Up List for Facilitators

- Position yourself above those who do not submit a cover letter
- Shows you are serious about the position you are applying for
- Shows that you understand the skills required for the specific position or opportunity
- Many interviewers will discard resumes that do not have a cover letter attached
- More professional to package a cover letter with a resume
- Creates a good first impression



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Get Attention!

As part of the package it is critical that both resumes and cover letters create a positive impression. Review with the students the criteria of a high quality resume.

- Tailored to job or opportunity applying for
- Formatted well – easy to read, quick to scan, spaced properly
- White paper
- Black ink
- Plain, easy to read font – for example, Times New Roman, Arial
- Font size 10 – 12 depending on length of resume (no smaller, no larger)
- No spelling or typing errors
- No short forms or abbreviations
- Not folded, wrinkly, messy

Emphasize that many of the same criteria apply to cover letters as well. Additional criteria specific to cover letters include the following:

- Use a conservative, professional business letter format
- Do not copy and send the same letter to a variety of opportunities
- Specifically personalize to the requirements of the opportunity
- Not longer than one page
- Provide a handwritten signature

COVER LETTERS: LET'S HAVE A LOOK!

Distribute one or both **Cover Letter Samples** (Handout 1 – A and B) and one or both complementary **Resume Samples** (Handout 2 – A and B).

Read the cover letter samples together with the students. Refer to the accompanying resumes and emphasize how key elements from the resumes including experiences, accomplishments and skills are highlighted in the cover letters.

Discuss with the students how a cover letter must highlight and elaborate on the information provided in the resume that is most relevant to the specific job or opportunity you are applying for. A cover letter tailored to these specific requirements will get attention. Remind them that if the letter is not tailored and targeted to a specific job or opportunity it may be immediately discarded, along with the resume!

Review the cover letter samples noting the following sections:

- **Salutation:** A specific person must be addressed by name when at all possible.
- **Goal of Opening Paragraph:** Include information on the position you are applying for and how you learned about it. Capture attention by offering a bit of information about you!



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- **Goal of Middle Paragraph:** Convince the reader why you are the right person for the job by stating skills and strengths, with examples, that specifically target the requirements of the opportunity.
- **Goal of Closing Paragraph:** Identify the next step such as a potential meeting time or an invitation to interview. Include specific information on how you may be contacted.
- **Closure:** Provide a handwritten signature. Enclosure means that a resume or application form accompanies the cover letter.

GETTING STARTED!

Note: Ideally students will produce a cover letter to accompany the resume they created using the Pick Up and Go Kit “Get Noticed: Resumes that Work!”.

Distribute the **Cover Letter Template Working Copy** (Handout 3).

Explain that the Cover Letter Template Working Copy is to be completed before inputting the information to the electronic cover letter template on computer.

Highlight the “Tips / Examples” boxes that appear for each cover letter section. The information featured in these boxes will assist the students to produce an excellent cover letter – a cover letter that will get attention!

Allow time for students to begin filling out the Cover Letter Template Working Copy.

Note: It will not be possible for students to complete the Cover Letter Template Working Copy in its entirety within a 40 minute session. It is recommended that the Working Copy be completed before inputting the information to the Electronic Cover Letter Template.

Handout 4, **Cover Letter Checklist**, is a tool students can use after they have input their cover letter to the electronic template as a means of self-checking to attain a high quality cover letter product.

WRAP UP

To clarify that the learning objectives have been accomplished, ask the students these questions:

Do you understand why it is important to include a cover letter when submitting a resume or application for a job or other opportunity?

Can you identify the purpose of each of the three paragraphs contained in a cover letter?

Do you know how to include relevant information on your experiences and skills so your cover letter gets noticed by the person reading it?

123 Career Avenue
Big City, Alberta
A1B 2C3

March 16, 2009

Sally Style
Assistant Manager
TrendE CloZ
111 Runway Drive
Big City, Alberta
A1B 3D4

Dear Mrs. Style,

In the Saturday, March 15th edition of the Big City Journal, I noticed your ad for a part time Sales Associate. I believe I have the communication, organizational and teamwork skills that would make me a great employee at TrendE CloZ, so I have enclosed my resume in application for this position.

Through my work as a Youth Volunteer at the Big City Hospital Centre, I have developed the ability to communicate well with individuals of all ages and to work successfully as a member of a team. I would be able to use these communication and teamwork skills to give excellent customer service as a sales associate in your store. At the Big City Cinema where I am an usher, I complete a variety of tasks in an organized and efficient way during my shifts. I am outgoing, creative and love fashion, so I am interested in taking training in the area of Fashion Merchandising after high school. I would enjoy getting experience in a retail fashion store.

I look forward to hearing from you to schedule an interview. I may be contacted at 403-987-6543. Thank you very much for considering me for this position.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Wantsajob

Mary Wantsajob

Enclosure

RR 7
Big Town, Alberta
TOM 5K0

May 1, 2009

Mr. Tom Firstgear
Firstgear Automotive Service
100 Oil Avenue
Big Town, Alberta
TOM 4P0

Dear Mr. Firstgear,

In response to your ad for a part time mechanic's assistant in the Saturday, April 29th edition of the Big Town News, I have enclosed my resume in application for this position. I believe that with my experience and my technical, teamwork, and problem solving skills, I would be a definite asset to your company.

Through my experience on the family farm, I have developed mechanical skills involving detecting minor problems and doing basic maintenance on a variety of farm vehicles. I plan to participate in a RAP program as an Automotive Service Technician Apprentice when I get to high school. Time management skills, which I developed in order to do my farm chores, play hockey and succeed at school, would help me do well in the position of mechanic's helper. Playing hockey has taught me to appreciate and get along not only with my hockey teammates, but also with other people that I work with.

I look forward to hearing from you to schedule an interview. I may be contacted at (403) 555-7842. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,

Cody Newworker

Cody Newworker

Enclosure

MARY WANTS A JOB

123 Career Avenue

Big City, Alberta

A1B 2C3

403-987-6543

ilovefashion@hotmail.com

OBJECTIVE Outgoing, creative, responsible student looking for part time work in the retail fashion industry. Strengths include communication, organization and teamwork skills.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Big City High School

Grade 9

Awards:

- Honour Roll June 2008
- Student of the Month November 2008

Special Courses/Certificates:

- Foods and Fashion
- Drama
- Information Processing
- Red Cross Babysitting Certificate
- Royal Lifesaving Bronze Cross
- Class 7 Alberta Driver's License

WORK EXPERIENCE

Usher

Big City Cinema

August 2008 - Present
Big City, Alberta

Babysitter

Mr. and Mrs. Joe Kidd

July 2006 - Present
Big City, Alberta

Youth Volunteer

Big City Regional Hospital Centre

March 2007 - Present
Big City, Alberta

ACTIVITIES

- Big City Freestyle Ski Club September 2005 - Present
- Big City High School Volleyball Team September - November 2008
- Big City Youth Choir September 2006 - May 2008



DEMONSTRATED SKILLS AND ABILITIES

Communication Skills:

- Provide friendly customer service to Big City Cinema patrons as an usher.
- Visit with patients of different ages as a volunteer at the Big City Regional Hospital Centre.
- Successfully presented a monologue, an Improv and skits during school Drama class.

Organization Skills:

- Organize activities, meals and bedtime routine for small children while babysitting.
- Complete duties efficiently as an usher at Big City Cinema.
- Successfully manage a part time job, homework and participation on sports teams and in a choir on a weekly basis.

Teamwork Skills:

- Dependable member of school's grade 9 volleyball team.
- Work with partner to deliver meal trays, fold linens and visit patients while volunteering at the Big City Regional Hospital Centre.
- Represented Zone 4 Freestyle Ski Team in the 2008 Alberta Winter Games.

REFERENCES

Available upon request

CODY NEWWORKER

RR 7
Big Town, Alberta
TOM 5K0
403-555-7842
ilovecars@hotmail.com

OBJECTIVE: Dependable, energetic, hardworking student looking for part time work in a mechanical shop. Strengths include technical, teamwork and problem solving skills.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Big Town Junior High School Grade 9

Awards:	Most Valuable Team Player (Hockey)	2008
	Reserve Champion (4-H)	2007

Special Courses/Certificates:	Emergency First Aid/Level A CPR	2008
	Class 7 Alberta Drivers License	2008

WORK EXPERIENCE

Farm Helper Jack and Suzie Miller Family Farm	2002 - Present RR 4, Big Town, Alberta
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Maintenance Assistant Big Town Golf Club	May - August, 2008 Big Town, Alberta
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Volunteer Worker Big Town Community Arena	2006 - Present Big Town, Alberta
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ACTIVITIES

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| • Big Town Minor Hockey Team | 2006 - 2008
Assistant Captain
(2007/2008) |
| • North Ridge 4H Beef Club | 2004 - Present
President (2007/2008)
Vice President (2006/2007) |



DEMONSTRATED SKILLS AND ABILITIES

Technical Skills:

- Operated tractor and back hoe when feeding cattle on family farm
- Helped with maintenance of farm machinery on family farm
- Operated and maintained lawn mowing equipment while working at Big Town Golf course

Teamwork Skills:

- Got along well with fellow employees while performing duties at the Big Town Golf Club
- Received Most Valuable Team Player Award for consistently respecting other hockey players
- Committed to working well with all club members as Vice President and President of the North Ridge 4H Beef Club

Problem Solving Skills:

- Able to detect many minor problems with farm machinery on the farm
- Responsible for assisting with organizing and setting up for various community events in the Big Town Community Arena
- Earned Reserve Champion Award for steer in 2007 by solving day to day problems of raising a calf for show

REFERENCES

Available upon request



COVER LETTER TEMPLATE WORKING COPY

RETURN ADDRESS:

TIPS / EXAMPLES:

- The return address is your mailing address.
- Do not use abbreviations in your address. *Example: Crescent not Cres., Street not St., Alberta not AB.*

ADDRESS:

TOWN / CITY AND PROVINCE:

POSTAL CODE:

DATE:

TIPS / EXAMPLES:

- All letters must include the date.
- Use the following format:
 - **Name of month (space) date (comma) year**
 - *Example: April 20, 2009*

DATE:

MAILING ADDRESS:

TIPS / EXAMPLES:

- The mailing address is the address of the person to whom you are sending the letter.
- Do your homework! If at all possible, find out the **first and last** names and the job title of the person you are sending the letter to. Doing this will create a great first impression!
- Double check that the spelling of the names and the company is correct.
- Do not use abbreviations for company names or in the address. *Example: Dairy Queen not DQ*

EMPLOYER'S NAME:

EMPLOYER'S TITLE OR POSITION:

NAME OF BUSINESS:

ADDRESS:

TOWN / CITY, PROVINCE:

POSTAL CODE:

SALUTATION:

TIPS / EXAMPLES:

- Do not use the first name of the person to whom you are sending the letter in the salutation.
- Place Mr. or Mrs. or Miss. or Ms. in front of the last name. Finding this out is part of your homework too! *Example: If the employer's name in the mailing address is John Smith the salutation would be "Dear Mr. Smith".*
- If you have tried and can't learn the person's name use "Dear Selection Committee" or "Dear Human Resources Manager"
- Do not use "Sir / Madam" or "To Whom it May Concern".

DEAR:



OPENING PARAGRAPH:

TIPS / EXAMPLES:

- GOAL OF PARAGRAPH : to capture interest of the reader
- CONTENT:
 - Indicate how you found out about the job. *Example: an ad in the paper, a "Help Wanted" sign in the window, a friend, etc.*
 - Name the specific job you are applying for.
 - In one sentence tell the reader what you offer the position.
 - State that a resume or application is enclosed.

MIDDLE PARAGRAPH:

TIPS / EXAMPLES:

- GOAL OF PARAGRAPH: to convince the reader of your skills
- CONTENT:
 - Provide "proof" that you are a strong candidate for the position. Emphasize at least three specific skills and experiences you have that are required in the position.
 - Explain how you can benefit the employer and the business!
 - Explain why you are interested in working for the employer.

Before writing this paragraph, review your resume and select at least three experiences that demonstrate skills relevant to the position you are writing the cover letter for. These experiences could be from previous paid work, volunteer work, school and activities. List these experiences and skills below:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Now, begin writing your paragraph using the experiences listed above to provide proof of the skills you possess that are relevant for the job:



CLOSING PARAGRAPH:

TIPS / EXAMPLES:

- GOAL OF PARAGRAPH: to identify the next step for the reader
- CONTENT:
 - Suggest an idea for follow up. *Examples: "I look forward to hearing from you to schedule an interview." OR "I am available to meet with you at your convenience." OR "I look forward to meeting you in an interview."*
 - Include your phone number to make it as easy as possible for the reader to contact you.
 - Thank the reader for the time they have devoted to reading through your letter – only one third of cover letters get read thoroughly!

CLOSURE:

TIPS / EXAMPLES:

- Select either "Yours truly" or "Yours sincerely" to close your cover letter.
- Once your letter is printed, sign your name in pen with black or blue ink in the space between the closing and your typed name five blank spaces below.
- "Enclosure" means you are also sending a resume or including an application form with the cover letter.

YOURS (Truly/Sincerely),

PRACTICE YOUR SIGNATURE!



COVER LETTER CHECKLIST

In addition to containing relevant highlights of your skills and experiences, your cover letter needs to look good to create a good impression of you. Before submitting your cover letter, go through the following checklist:

- ☐ The letter is addressed to a specific person, when available, including name and position within business or organization.
- ☐ The position or opportunity I am applying for is indicated in the opening paragraph.
- ☐ In the middle paragraph I have provided highlights of my skills and experiences relevant to the opportunity I am applying for.
- ☐ I have asked for an interview or meeting in the third, closing paragraph.
- ☐ I have included my contact information in the closing paragraph.
- ☐ I have carefully read my cover letter looking for any spelling, typing or grammar errors to correct.
- ☐ I have asked at least one adult to read and check my cover letter.
- ☐ I have corrected any spelling, typing or grammar errors.
- ☐ I have not hand printed any additions or corrections.
- ☐ I have limited the number of sentences starting with "I".
- ☐ I have not used abbreviations or short forms.
- ☐ My cover letter is not longer than one page.
- ☐ My cover letter is printed on white paper.
- ☐ My cover letter is not folded.